

[By Neal Goswami](#)

Vermont's congressional delegation said Friday that the Vermont Veterans Home is on a high priority list to receive funding from the Department of Veterans Affairs to create an electronic medical records system.

U.S. Rep. Peter Welch, a Democrat, told Veterans Home Administrator Melissa Jackson during a visit Friday that the funds are not certain, but very likely to be approved.

"I understand that it's very likely that we're going to get a significant grant for electronic medical records," Welch said. "That's amazing. The state's ready to do the 35 percent match. ... It's not totally a done deal, but it's likely. We expect it."

The grant, if approved, would provide more than \$790,000 for the project, through the VA's State Home Construction Grant program. The federal government provides 65 percent of the project's cost and requires the state to cover the remaining 35 percent. Welch said state officials have confirmed that state matching funds have already been secured.

Jackson said the home applies for funding each year, typically for "bed-generating" improvements. But more money is available in the grant program for other projects, like electronic medical records, because many states are not willing to put up the matching funds, she said.

The grant will help staff deliver improved care to veterans more efficiently, according to Jackson.

"The EMR will decrease the amount of time our staff spends completing daily documentation and increase the amount of time they spend with our veterans and members," she said.

Once approved, Jackson said the system will take about 12 to 18 months to implement.

Dr. Peter King, medical director of the VA outpatient clinic in Bennington, uses electronic medical records when treating his patients. He also treats patients at the veterans home, where paper records for each patient are about six inches deep, on average.

"All you have to do is look at one chart and it's a workout. You don't have to go to the gym that day. It's just full of paper and it just reminds you why we went to electronic records," King said.

Implementing a system at the veterans home that is compatible with the VA system will allow for improved communication across departments.

Meanwhile, Andy Lacasse, assistant to the director of the White River Junction Veterans Administration Medical Center, said many Vermont veterans receive care in different parts of the state. Electronic records will ensure that doctors have complete medical histories and charts.

"A good percentage of our population goes south to get away from the winter. We hope that they make that connection with the VA down there in Florida or Arizona, but when they go to the private service that's when we really have to do due diligence to make sure we check everything. Do we have their full records? Do we have everything we need to make for Dr. King to make a good ... assessment. That's where his job becomes more complex because he's hoping he's got everything. He's pretty sure he has everything," Lacasse said. "You don't want to be 85 percent sure, you want to be 100 percent sure."

U.S. Sens. Patrick Leahy, a Democrat, and Bernie Sanders, an independent, along with Welch, said in a joint statement that the grant is "a promising prospect for improving the quality of care for those brave Vermonters who have our served our country in uniform."